



The Lab Notebook

Oh What a Beautiful Day – To Get Outside and Have Some Fun!

The snow is gone and warm weather is just around the corner. It's time to plan your spring activities. What better way to start than celebrating **Your National Parks!**

The President has proclaimed April 22 – 29, 2007, as National Park Week, for celebration and recognition of Your National Parks. "Your National Parks are living examples of the best this Nation has to offer - our magnificent natural landscapes and our varied yet interrelated heritage." The theme of National Park Week 2007 is *Your National Parks: Explore, Learn, and Protect*. This year during National Park Week, the first annual National Junior Ranger Day, will be held on April 28th. National Parks nationwide are developing special Junior Ranger activities that will allow children and families to receive special certificates, badges, and pins.

The Site will be celebrating National Junior Ranger Days on Friday,



Saturday and Sunday, **April 27, 28 and 29, 2007**, at Glenmont. We will offer special Junior Ranger activities each day for families to *Explore, Learn, and Protect* national parks.

On Friday, you can explore the National Park Service. Did you know that within 50 miles of the Site you can visit a National Park where you can swim in the ocean; visit the birthplace of a president; tour a historic military fortification; visit a wildlife refuge and learn how 10,000 soldiers endured the cold winter of 1779? Special films will be shown in the Glenmont Garage at 1:30pm, 2:30pm, and 3:30pm.

On Saturday, April 28th from 10:00am until 12:00pm families can help with various grounds projects at the Glenmont estate to earn their Junior Ranger Badge. We will plant a Junior Ranger flower bed that we hope our new Junior Rangers will keep coming back to maintain! Come prepared to be outside and have fun!

On Sunday, April 29th families can learn about National Park Rangers. What do they do? How can you become one? Come talk with a Ranger at 1:45pm, 2:45pm and 3:45pm.

Special films, exhibits and opportunities to earn your Junior Ranger Badge will be offered all weekend between 12:00pm and 4:00pm.

We hope that all of our new Junior Rangers will come back to work at Glenmont on **June 2, 2007 -- Edison Day!** Have you ever wondered what



Join us on Edison Day, June 2, 2007, for special programs, tours, activities, and more!

was in the basement of Glenmont, what cars the Edison family liked to drive, or what the Edison children did without MP3 players or TV? Then you need to be part of Edison Day! This annual event will take place this year on Saturday, June 2nd from 10:00am to 4:00pm at the Glenmont estate. You can visit the family garage, barn and greenhouse, take a tour of the basement of Glenmont and participate in special programs for children and adults.

Volunteers and Junior Rangers are needed to help visitors find their way around and help with some of the activities. Let us know if you are interested!

To get a complete schedule of activities for National Park Week or Edison Day or to volunteer to help, call Karen Sloat-Olsen at 973-736-2783 extension 6 or email karen_sloat-olsen@nps.gov.

Message from the Superintendent

I am not at all sure about this "all good things must come to an end" philosophy.....but I am working hard on a stiff upper lip to write this column – my last for the Lab Notebook. The good news is that I have been presented with an enormous opportunity and honor – I have accepted a position as our Northeast Region's Associate Director for Resource Stewardship and Science. The bad news, of course, is that the position is in Philadelphia. I know, I know, "I was there once...." I'll write a response to WC Fields some other time! For now, I want to assure you that learning and working at Edison NHS and doing so with the absolute best partners and staff any Superintendent in the National Park Service can have, has been, quite simply, a privilege. Look at what we have accomplished together!

From systems to protect our largest artifacts – our historic structures, to our "brand new old" Building 11, state of the art exhibit galleries, accessibility for all visitors, audio and visual interpretive programs at the Lab, the expanded estate tour at Glenmont - does the list even end there? Of course not! To paraphrase Mr. Edison, we HAVE found a way to do it better! As exciting as all of these changes are, I cannot let an opportunity pass to tell you all how deeply my heart has been touched over the years by all of you associated with the Edison site. Will any of us ever forget the visits by Bruce Babbitt, Hillary Clinton, Mary Bomar – remember the reproduction of Secretary Babbitt's campaign signs from Notre Dame? The Main Street gate lined with uniformed employees to greet Director Bomar? Rained out Edison Days? The Friends of Edison Golf Tournament and Taste of West Orange? VIP's and musicians making wax cylinder recordings? Dancing in the Courtyard? Edison Field Day? Some of my personal favorites – our parking lot filled to capacity with Garden Club volunteers, our new Mr. Edison Muppet, the Garden Shop at the Potting Shed and, of course, the young men from Seton Hall Prep. A privilege indeed...Thank you all - we have a date at the grand reopening!

Please welcome Randy Turner who will be Acting Superintendent in my absence. He will continue to be Superintendent at Morristown National Historic al Park, also.

- Marianne Gerbauckas

Musicianless Band Debuts at Black Maria Film Festival

Filmgoers who attended this year's Black Maria Film Festival in West Orange were treated to the debut of a new animation about Mr. Edison as a boy. "The Musicianless Band" is just one in a series for young audiences centered on Mr. Edison's world of invention. The brainchild of George Keegan, Executive Director of the Edison Innovation Foundation, and Randy Rossilli, President of Nightstand Creations, Inc., *The Adventures of Young Thomas Edison* is an entertaining way for children to learn about this exciting phase of American history.

An elder Mr. Edison, as a puppet, introduces the story from his desk at his Laboratory in West Orange. The series then veers back in time to Mr. Edison's childhood where we glimpse young Tom and his Young Muckers, Jenny, Ezra and Lewis meeting the challenge of his latest dilemma. In "The Musicianless Band" Tom invents a way for the music to play on and on at the state fair. The debut goes well until... well, let's see - there's a real tired mouse, broken equipment, a bit of an



The Thomas Edison puppet, Co-Creator and Puppeteer Randy Rossilli, and Devon D'Amico enjoy some time during Mr. Edison's birthday party.

explosion...you get it...this invention business can be a real nail biter! The lesson? If at first...or, as Mr. Edison put it, "There's a way to do it better. Find it." The property is currently being considered by the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) as an addition to its national programming

The elder Mr. Edison made a personal appearance before the film's debut at his 160th birthday party. Birthday cake provided by the Friends of Edison was enjoyed by all.

Conservation Work at Glenmont



Above: Conservator Daisy Craddock paints over a section of newly painted base coat.

Right: A section of wall on the stair landing is scraped and patched with plaster in preparation for a base coat and faux painting.



Paint and underlying layers of plaster in the second floor hall of Glenmont deteriorated due to age, changes in temperature, relative humidity, and abrasion from visitors walking past the walls. During March and April,

conservators stabilized areas that were flaking plaster and/or paint. Areas affected were then patched and painted with a rag technique to restore the historic wall finish.

The Ordeal of Thomas Edison

In his new book, “The Wizard of Menlo Park: How Thomas Alva Edison Invented the Modern World,” Randall Stross argues that the invention of the phonograph was a pivotal event in Edison’s life. Before he unveiled the tinfoil phonograph in December 1877, Edison had made significant contributions to telegraphy, but outside of a relatively small community of telegraph industry managers and inventors, he was not widely known.

Press accounts of the phonograph made Edison famous. The public flocked to Menlo Park to catch a glimpse of Edison or his new invention. Newspaper reporters eagerly sought interviews with Edison, while Edison, for his part, gladly pontificated, for the record, on myriad subjects. The media helped create an image of Edison as a tireless inventor who could solve any technical challenge. By the early 1880s Edison had been dubbed the “Wizard of Menlo Park,” a persona he held for the rest of his life. A test of Edison’s notoriety came in 1911, when an un-addressed envelope mailed from North Carolina with only his picture reached Edison’s desk in nineteen days.

Previous Edison biographers have acknowledged his fame, but Stross, a professor of business at San Jose State University, unpacks the complex relationship between Edison’s cultural status and his record as an inventor and entrepreneur. Fame was not merely the result of his accomplishments but an important influence on how Edison

operated. Stross challenges the conventional view that Edison deliberately created his own public image, claiming that he unwittingly achieved fame at an early age and that his efforts to control his persona were only partially successful.

Edison appreciated the value of his fame for attracting potential investors and promoting his inventions, but celebrity also brought negative consequences. Dealing with newspaper reporters diverted Edison’s attention from his work. Stross claims that Edison failed to develop a marketable phonograph at Menlo Park because he was distracted by media attention.

Newspaper flattery gave Edison a heightened sense of his own infallibility, a trait that proved problematic for his business interests. Stross notes that Edison was averse to taking advice from anyone. He frequently based business decisions on his own strongly held beliefs, despite market forces that suggested alternative strategies.

During the 1880s Edison lost a critical battle with George Westinghouse over which electrical distribution system, AC or DC, would become the industry standard. In his early years at West Orange, Edison failed to recognize the entertainment value of the phonograph and motion pictures. In the early 20th century Edison refused to invest in mass circulation advertising and celebrity recording artists to promote his phonograph business, allowing the Victor Talking Machine Co. to overtake him in the market.



Thomas Edison portrayed as “The Wizard of Menlo Park” in a newspaper illustration.

Stross’ book is ostensibly about Edison’s fame, but it essentially deals with Edison’s inability to live up to his own reputation as the greatest inventor in American history. As Stross concludes, “after the phonograph and electric light, his inventive efforts across five decades produced one claim to a major success, movies – a claim contested by others – as well as minor hits in other fields and some major misses. For all his accomplishments, Edison failed to invent a way to free himself from unrealistic expectations produced by his own past.”

Interview with Author Randy Stross

As the “Digital Domain” columnist for the *New York Times* and the author of several books on Silicon Valley, including *The Microsoft Way: The Real Story of How the Company Outsmarts Its Competitors*, Randall Stross is familiar with high-tech innovation and entrepreneurship. In this interview with Edison NHS archivist Lenny DeGraaf, Stross talks about Edison’s influence on the computer industry, venture capitalism and popular culture.

How did you become interested in writing about Edison? About fifteen

years ago, I worked on a book about Steve Jobs, who greatly admired Edison. When I wrote the book, I found myself comparing Jobs and Edison at several points. (One example: Edison had more than 1,000 patents; Jobs had zero). My next book was about Bill Gates and Microsoft, and once again, I kept running into Edison. I discovered that any contemporary figure in the computer industry today owes not a little to Edison, and eventually I decided it was time to delve into Edison’s life story in a serious way.

What was the most surprising thing you learned about Edison during your research? With the invention of the phonograph, Edison became famous, overnight. And with fame came crowds of curiosity-seekers that barged into his laboratory; fame also brought bags of letters begging him for money. I was surprised at how unrestrained the public was in seeking out the suddenly famous Edison – and I was surprised at how eerily familiar the phenomenon of celebrity in the 1870s was to what we see today.

(continued next page)

Laundry Room Exhibit Opens at Glenmont

In January 2007, the Edison family's historic Laundry room opened for exhibit to the public. For the first time in the history of our museum, visitors have an opportunity to see this period room that played a significant role in the operation of the Edison household. A room that appears in the original architectural plans for the 1880 home, the Laundry was used through the 1920s.

Previously a staff office, now the room is a useful tool to tell the story of the servants who worked in this area. A salaried laundress first appears on the payroll records for the home in 1892. Her duties would have been arduous and time consuming. Laundry days were known as "Blue Monday" because Monday was often designated as laundry day in households of that era. Tasks at the turn of the century included heating up containers or kettles of water on a coal burning stove and then using the water to hand wash clothes and household items in porcelain sinks or washing tubs. Tools such as laundry forks and laundry plungers were used to agitate and to transfer the clothing. Laundresses also used a harsh dye referred to as blue dye

during the process. The dye was known to whiten and brighten clothing. Lastly, the goods were hung out to dry and then painstakingly ironed using irons that were heated up on the stove and gently run over the washed items.

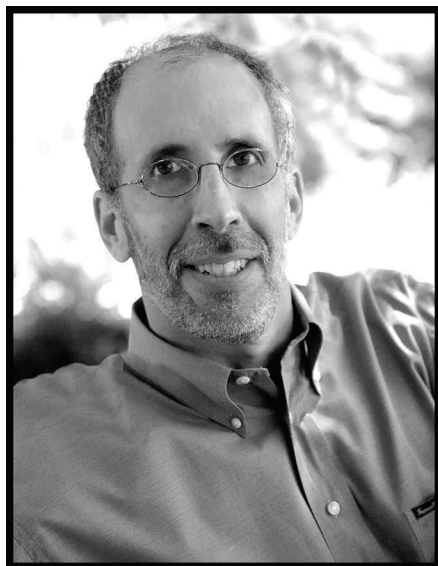
Visitors can still see many of the historic objects inside the room that actually belonged to the Edison household. The long tables used for ironing and folding are original. Visitors can also see the historic porcelain washing sinks and the coal stove used by Edison staff. A dramatic effect is created by the laundry lines that hang above the work area in the room. These lines were used to dry clothing in the winter and in inclement weather when the outdoor laundry yard could not be accessed. Many sundries in the room are also original such as the irons, some textiles, and an Edison laundry bag. In the corner, the room also displays a 1920s *Thor* electric washing machine and an *Edicraft* electric iron made by one of the Edison companies. These items demonstrate how the task of laundry changed during the Edison era as new technology was introduced into households in America.



Beth Miller, Curator of Glenmont, and summer intern George Ryan pose in the recently opened Laundry Room.

The creation of the Laundry room was a team effort with many contributors. Staff members at the park worked together to install items in the room as well as transport objects like the washing machine from other areas of the house. Volunteers made donations to outfit the room with period sundries. Student intern George Ryan conducted research on the topic of laundry rooms and their use at the turn of the century. Overall, the result is an interesting exhibit that can now be enjoyed by all visitors who come to the park to learn about Glenmont and its inhabitants.

Interview with Author Randy Stross (continued from previous page)



Randy Stross, author of the recent book about Thomas Edison, *"The Wizard of Menlo Park: How Thomas Alva Edison Invented the Modern World."*

How are Edison's experiences as an inventor and business leader relevant today? During Edison's long career in business, he was rarely subject to the oversight of a board of directors, and when he did have to report to a board (at Edison Electric) he either filled the board with his own candidates – or left the business. One thing that strikes me most about invention and entrepreneurship in Edison's era and today is the way venture capital today supplies oversight that helps a new venture succeed when it hits the limitations of the founder. Edison's insistence on maintaining personal control is a cautionary tale for modern times.

Why do you think the image of Edison as a "heroic inventor" persists in popular culture? The persistence of his popularity owes much, I think, to our recognition, at some deep level, that the Edison model of invention – a single figure directing a small team of loyal assistants on a modest budget, free of corporate or investors' control – has passed and will

never return. Edison is the figure who represents unlimited opportunity we like to believe is open to anyone, regardless of financial circumstances: build it (in your own garage) and the world will come!

Does Edison's status as a celebrity tell us anything about public attitudes towards technological innovation? Ever since Edison's day, the public has been fascinated with technology that we might call high-tech consumer technology. The phonograph is the direct lineal predecessor, of course, of the iPod, and the public became infatuated with the phonograph upon word of its invention – and years before a commercial phonograph was actually ready for the mass market. When looking back at Edison's fame from the vantage point of the present, we can see that as a culture we have had a particular soft spot for consumer electronics – even before the "electronics" had been invented.

Meet Karen Sloat-Olsen

Chief of Interpretation at Edison NHS



Karen Sloat-Olsen in the Glenmont Conservatory.

Karen is currently Chief of Interpretation at Edison National Historic Site, and her years here have given her a wealth of experience. Karen graduated from Moravian College, majoring in Colonial American history in the Museum Studies Program, and held several positions in small private museums. She joined Edison in 1983 as clerk/typist and

secretary to the Superintendent; she also served as the first secretary for the Friends of Edison NHS. These duties enabled her to see the inner workings of the park and provided her with a wide-angle view of park operations and partnerships.

When asked to name her best experience, Karen readily answers, “Change!” Working at a historic site like Edison has shown her that history is definitely not static. Karen explained that the ongoing research at the Site has enabled Interpretation to remain current. She points with pride to the recent changes in the presentation of Edison home life at Glenmont, no longer a “stepchild” to the Laboratory. Mina Miller Edison’s role is more fully explained to visitors, focusing on her partnership with her husband and the role she played in the whole invention process. In addition, the whole estate—

garage, barn, greenhouse—is interpreted, not just the main house.

Karen’s commitment to her work is palpable when she speaks fondly of one of her most memorable experiences. One audience for the high school program “Who’s the Victor?” (which compares Edison and Victor recordings and marketing) was a group of exceptionally troubled teens—gang members, in fact. She watched them change during the course of their visit. Initially, acting too tough for the program, they became mesmerized by the phonograph in action as well as the entire presentation. She was astonished once again by the spell that Edison and his laboratory can cast over visitors, or as Karen puts it, “the power of this place.” That’s what Interpretation is all about.

Play Ball!



Is that a change-up Mr. Edison is serving up to the batter? This photo was taken at an Edison Field Day celebration at Olympic Park in Irvington, July 16, 1912. Laboratory and factory workers enjoyed a full (and probably exhausting) day of track and field events followed by a picnic. This double-spread photo was probably prepared for inclusion in an Edison company publication, and it’s playing a similar role again.



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Local Occupational Center Works at Edison NHS

It's a natural – one historic New Jersey institution that celebrates the entrepreneurial spirit and another venerated New Jersey institution that practices entrepreneurship. Edison NHS has been in partnership with the First Occupational Center of New Jersey for nearly 14 years. The Center is the State's oldest and largest vocational training and job placement agency, providing services to developmentally disabled, elderly and economically disadvantaged residents. Located on Lakeside Avenue in West Orange, just down the block from Mr. Edison's Laboratory, the Occupational Center has utilized the Site to provide training to students who are about to enter the workplace and has also successfully bid on projects at the Site. Occupational center trainees have worked in Administration, Maintenance and Interpretation. There is always a Center Supervisor nearby as an individual or a crew works in the park, to provide that much needed extra



Workers from the Occupational Center pick up leaves on the grounds of Glenmont.

attention in the steps toward independence. Occupational center workers are great employees! Facility Manager Charly Magale says he has always been "very happy with the results" when he hires them. Whether the accomplishment is snow removal or raking all 15 acres of leaves at Glenmont, the benefits to the Site, the Occupational Center and this group of workers are extraordinary . . . and extraordinarily heartwarming.